WE CLAIM:

1. A method for generating a hepatic cell culture comprising co-culturing hepatocytes and nonparenchymal cells, in the presence of growth factors and a matrix coated with at least one biologically active molecule that promotes cell adhesion, proliferation or survival under conditions sufficient to allow for the proliferation of hepatocytes that retain hepatic function.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the hepatocytes and nonparenchymal cells are derived from a liver tissue sample.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the matrix is in the form of polystyrene beads.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the matrix is coated with an extracelluar matrix protein.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the matrix is coated with type I collagen.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein the growth factor is epidermal growth factor.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein the growth factor is hepatocyte growth factor.

8. A method for generating a three-dimensional hepatic cell culture system comprising:

contacting a three-dimensional support matrix with a hepatic cell culture comprising hepatocytes and nonparenchymal cells bound to a matrix coated with at least one biologically active molecule that promotes cell adhesion, proliferation or survival;

under conditions sufficient to allow for the proliferation of the hepatic cell culture to form a three-dimensional hepatic cell structure.

9. The method of claim 8 wherein the hepatocytes and nonparenchymal cells derived from a liver tissue sample.

10. The method of claim 8 wherein the matrix is in the form of a biomatrix gel.

11. The method of claim 8 wherein the matrix is coated with an extracelluar matrix protein.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein the matrix is coated with type I collagen.

13. The method of claim 8 wherein the matrix further comprises growth factors incorporated into said matrix.

14. A population of matrix/hepatic cell clusters comprising hepatocytes and nonparenchymal cells associated with a matrix coated with at least one biologically active molecule that promotes cell adhesion, proliferation or survival.

15. A composition comprising matrix/hepatic cell clusters grown on a three-dimensional support matrix wherein said matrix hepatic cell clusters comprising hepatocytes and nonparenchymal cells bound to a matrix coated with at least one biologically active molecule that promotes cell adhesion, proliferation or survival.

16. A three-dimensional tissue culture matrix prepared by a process comprising:

contacting a three-dimensional support matrix with a hepatic cell culture comprising hepatocytes and

nonparenchymal cells bound to a matrix coated with at least one biologically active molecule that promotes cell adhesion, proliferation or survival;

under conditions sufficient to allow for the proliferation of the hepatic cell culture.

17. A method for providing hepatic function in a subject having a liver disorder comprising administering to said subject a three-dimensional tissue culture matrix prepared by a process comprising:

contacting a three-dimensional support matrix with a hepatic cell culture comprising hepatocytes and nonparenchymal cells bound to a matrix coated with at least one biologically active molecule that promotes cell adhesion, proliferation or survival, under conditions sufficient to allow for the proliferation of the hepatic cell culture;

in an amount sufficient to reduce the symptoms associated with the liver disorder.

18. The method of claim 17 wherein the liver disorder is cirrhosis of the liver.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein the liver disorder is hepatitis.

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